

Paige lived on the plains of Texas. The land was flat as far as the eye could see. In the evening, the setting sun seemed to set right into the ground. It looked like a huge flaming ball that touched the ground. There were no trees to bump into, only scrub bushes.

Even the animals seemed different in Texas. There were lots of jackrabbits and armadillos. There were also lots of rattlesnakes and tarantulas. Tarantulas are huge, black, furry spiders. The bite from a tarantula would not kill a person. However, the bite could make a person very sick. Paige was scared of the snakes and the spiders. They seemed big and mean to her.

Paige rode the bus to school on the first day of the new school year. The last thought on her mind was snakes and spiders. Paige was busy thinking about her new teacher. Would her new teacher be nice or mean this year? Paige thought about all of her friends at school. She knew it would be great to see her friends after a long summer at home. Paige also thought about Buster. Buster was the meanest kid in her class. Buster always did something mean to the new teacher at the beginning of the year. Paige wondered what Buster had in mind for the new teacher this year.

When Paige got to school, she lined up behind the other third graders. They were going to walk down the hall to the new teacher's classroom. Ahead, in line, she saw two of her best friends. They were whispering to each other. "Joan and Kathy," Paige yelled, "come back here." The two girls came back to join Paige. After giving her a hug, they told her what they were whispering about. "We think Buster is up to his old tricks," they said. "We think he has something planned for the new teacher."

Mrs. Smith, the new teacher, greeted the students. "She seems very nice," Paige whispered to Joan. Paige kept her eye on Buster. She knew he would do something mean.

The teacher walked up to the blackboard to write the date. As soon as she turned around, Buster tiptoed to the front of the room with a glass jar in his hand. Quietly, Buster unscrewed the lid of the jar. Out of the jar dropped a huge, black tarantula! The whole class began to scream as the tarantula crawled across the floor. Mrs. Smith turned around and gasped in horror. Buster grinned with delight as the teacher and students raced for the door.

Paige stopped as she got to the door. "You are just plain mean, Buster," Paige said. She grabbed a yardstick from beside the door and began to beat the tarantula until it was dead. The rest of the class stopped and clapped their hands for Paige's bravery. Mrs. Smith gave Paige a hug. She grabbed Buster by the ear and marched him down to the office. Paige smiled with relief. One thing was for sure, she was no longer scared of spiders.

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